

07/07/21 Wednesday

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I Just Can't Help Myself: Weeks After Apology, MTG Compares COVID Safety Efforts to Holocaust Again
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

It's been barely three weeks since US Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) paid a visit to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and apologized for comparing COVID-19 safety measures to the genocide of Jews and other minorities by the Nazis. That must mean it's about time for her to do it again.

Never one to disappoint, Greene put out a furious tweet on Tuesday in response to a clip of US President Joe Biden saying that more thorough community outreach may be necessary to ensure that those not yet vaccinated against COVID-19 get information about the shot.

"Biden pushing a vaccine that is NOT FDA approved shows covid is a political tool used to control people," the Georgia Republican tweeted. "People have a choice, they don't need your medical brown shirts showing up at their door ordering vaccinations. You can't force people to be part of the human experiment."

The term "brownshirts" is slang for the Sturmabteilung, a fascist paramilitary outfit that helped Nazi leader Adolf Hitler rise to power in 1930s Germany. They were known for their unofficial but organized street violence against leftist and other opposition parties, LGBTQ people and Jews. The implication is that Biden would force Americans via threats or acts of violence to get one of the three COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in the US. However, there is no mandatory vaccination requirement for US citizens or residents, nor has there ever been.

Moreover, Greene's claim that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) hasn't "approved" any of the vaccines is also incorrect. While the FDA hasn't given any of them full approval, it granted emergency authorization for use of the [Moderna](#), [Pfizer-BioNTech](#), and [Johnson & Johnson](#) vaccines before each was administered to Americans.

The Biden administration set a goal of getting at least one COVID-19 vaccine shot to at least 70% of US adults by July 4, but [has fallen short](#) of that goal by about 3%. However, the vaccination campaign has been highly uneven, with more rural and politically conservative states and areas showing significantly lower vaccination rates than more liberal and urban areas. Daily new COVID-19 cases and deaths have fallen to their lowest point since the early weeks of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, a development credited largely to vaccinations. However, new variants of the virus that [have proven resistant](#) to vaccines threaten to sweep through the population, endangering people not yet protected by the vaccine.

Greene's comments have been widely condemned, including by leaders of her own party in Congress and by the White House. The American Jewish Congress advocacy [group said Wednesday](#) that Greene "continues to prove that there is no limit to her brutal trivialization of the Holocaust for her own personal political power."

“With antisemitism rising to levels unseen in decades, we call on all Members of Congress to denounce Rep. Greene,” they said.

It was only on June 14 [that Greene said](#) at a press conference outside the US Capitol building that she had “made a mistake” and wanted to “own it,” claiming a visit to the Holocaust Memorial Museum had awakened to her the error of comparing mask mandates, COVID-19 vaccine passports, and other safety measures to the genocide of millions of Jews, Roma, LGBTQ people, Slavs, and other minorities by the Nazis.

“The horrors of the Holocaust are something that some people don’t even believe happened and some people deny, but there is no comparison to the Holocaust,” she said, adding “and there are words that I have said remarks that I’ve made, that I know are offensive, and for that I want to apologize; antisemitism is true hate, and I saw that today at the Holocaust Museum.”

“And I think it’s something that we should all remember and never forget. So I just wanted to come here today and say that I’m truly sorry for offending people with remarks about the Holocaust, there’s no comparison. There never ever will be.”

An estimated 11.5 million people were killed in large-scale massacres and in the industrialized concentration camp system established by the Nazis across the parts of Europe they conquered in the 1930s and 1940s, 6 million of whom were Jews, accounting for two-thirds of the European Jewish population at the time.

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‘Science, Not Speculation’: Scientists Blast Obsession With ‘Unsubstantiated’ COVID Lab Leak Theory

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

When rumors began that the newly discovered novel coronavirus had escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology in February 2020, an international group of scientists penned a letter in defense of their Chinese colleagues, who had sequenced the virus’ genome, concluded it was of natural origin, and denied claims the virus had been stored at the lab.

Two dozen prominent scientists from around the globe, including physicians, veterinarians, epidemiologists, virologists, biologists, ecologists, and public health experts, penned a letter published in the British medical journal [The Lancet on Monday](#), urging that “science, not speculation, is essential to determine how SARS-CoV-2 reached humans.” Many of them had also signed the [February 2020 letter](#), which The Lancet also published.

World leaders and public figures must “turn down the heat of the rhetoric and turn up the light of scientific inquiry” about the origins of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, if humanity hopes to defeat the present pandemic, to say nothing of preventing the next one, the scientists warned.

“We believe the strongest clue from new, credible, and peer-reviewed evidence in the scientific literature is that the virus evolved in nature, while suggestions of a laboratory-leak source of the pandemic remain without scientifically validated evidence that directly supports it in peer-reviewed scientific journals,” the scientists wrote.

“Careful and transparent collection of scientific information is essential to understand how the virus has spread and to develop strategies to mitigate the ongoing impact of COVID-19, whether it occurred wholly within nature or might somehow have reached the community via an alternative route, and prevent future pandemics,” they said. “Allegations and conjecture are of no help, as they do not facilitate access to information and objective assessment of the pathway from a bat virus to a human pathogen that might help to prevent a future pandemic.”

Lab Leak Theory Gains Currency

Claims that SARS-CoV-2 escaped from the Wuhan virology lab have spread since early 2020, when the virus caused a major outbreak in the surrounding Hubei Province of China. However, as [Sputnik has reported](#), the claims have derived from and been amplified by far-right anti-Chinese figures, including then-US President Donald Trump, members of his administration, including Steve Bannon, one of Trump’s senior advisers.

Recent [polls have shown](#) that 83% of Americans would support US actions to punish China if the lab leak theory is found to be true, including trade penalties, travel sanctions, a boycott of the 2022 Summer Olympics, and even payment of reparations to families whose loved ones died of COVID-19. Moreover, 46% of Americans [surveyed in mid-June](#) believed in the lab leak theory, including 70% of Republicans, 41% of Independents, and 32% of Democrats.

Nonetheless, the World Health Organization (WHO) [investigated the possibility](#) as one of several during an information-sharing visit with Chinese colleagues in Wuhan in early 2021. Their report eliminated no possibilities, but rated a lab leak as among the least likely of five possibilities. The others included two types of zoonotic transfer, introduction through the cold chain, and the international military games held in Wuhan two months before the first COVID-19 cases were identified.

Before the WHO’s report was even complete, Western media, politicians, and conspiracy theorists [were already claiming](#) it was inadequate and faulting the Chinese for supposedly withholding evidence, even though members of the WHO team publicly dispelled those claims. In the aftermath, the lab leak theory continued to spread in the media and became increasingly mainstream, with the Biden administration bowing to popular pressure in May and ordering US intelligence to produce a report in 90 days on the virus’ origins.

Scientists Denounce Tit-for-Tat

However, the Monday letter’s authors didn’t just criticize this swelling of what they called “unsubstantiated allegations”: they also criticized the Chinese government [for returning fire](#). “Reckrimination has not, and will not, encourage international cooperation and collaboration. New viruses can emerge anywhere, so maintaining transparency and cooperation between scientists everywhere provides an essential early warning system. [Cutting professional links](#) and reducing data sharing will not make us safer,” they wrote.

They pointed to the WHO’s March report as “the beginning rather than the end of an inquiry” and backed the [Group of Seven’s](#) June call for “a timely, transparent, expert-led, and science-based WHO-convened phase 2 COVID-19 origins study.” However, they cautioned that the results could take years to be arrived at, and that an origin might never be uncovered. The origins of another closely related coronavirus, SARS-CoV-1, which causes Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), were only partially triangulated in 2017, 15 years after the outbreak it caused. The [scientists found bats](#) in a remote cave in China’s Yunnan Province that had inside them coronaviruses with all the building blocks of SARS, but couldn’t actually prove

SARS had come from them. Others, like the coronaviruses that cause the common cold, have never had their origins found.

Leo Poon Lit-man, a professor in the University of Hong Kong's School of Public Health who signed both the Monday letter and the February 2020 letter, told the [South China Morning Post](#) that "a lack of dialogue and communication" was slowing the science down.

"We just don't have a healthy dialogue and, in terms of public health, we have to build on trust," he told the Hong Kong-based paper. "I just don't see there is trust between governments and within scientific communities, and we need to find a way to reconcile this issue."

Asked about the Lancet letter at a Wednesday morning press conference, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [Wang Wenbin said](#) that "attempts to politicize study of origins to scapegoat other countries will only end... in failure."

Wang said it was clear the US was engaged in "more and more overt political manipulation" by "hyping up the China 'lab leak' theory" and "vilifying" the WHO report to "alter the fact that it is the US politicians who dismiss science and politicize epidemic response that should be held accountable for the loss of more than 600,000 American lives."

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'Alleged Assassins' of Haitian President Moïse Taken Into Custody, Communications Minister Says

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Haitian Secretary of State for Communication Frantz Exantus said Wednesday evening that the "alleged assassins" of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse had been apprehended. Moïse was slain by armed gunmen at his home outside Port-au-Prince early Wednesday morning.

Exantus said the suspects had been arrested in the Pelerin neighborhood around 6 pm Wednesday evening by the National Police and promised more information would be forthcoming.

Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik that "some of them" had been caught and were being interrogated, implying they believe others remained at large. No officials have given any estimate as to how many suspects there are.

Photos circulating on social media purported to show the two men apprehended by the Haitian National Police (PNH).

Claude Joseph, the country's acting prime minister and de facto leader following Moïse's death, said the army and police have the president's killers surrounded and were engaged in a firefight, with four "mercenaries" shot in addition to the two that had been captured.

The PNH chief told reporters that three police officers had been held hostage by the gunmen but had been freed. He pledged that all the gunmen would be either killed or captured.

Their arrest comes just hours after Joseph announced a two-week-long state of emergency giving police widespread powers to hunt down the assassins.

Moïse, 53, was killed by a group of gunmen early Wednesday morning at his private residence, also in Pelerin. Eyewitness reports have claimed the men identified themselves as US federal

agents from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), but Edmond rejected this assertion, saying the killing had been "carried out by foreign mercenaries and professional killers - well-orchestrated." [Joseph also said](#) on Wednesday afternoon that some of the suspects spoke Spanish and English.

His wife, Martine, was severely wounded in the attack and was rushed to Miami, Florida, where she is in [stable but critical condition](#) at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

Mass protests have swelled across Haiti since early 2021, when Moïse rejected a court ruling that his presidential term had expired and claimed he had another year left, due to his inauguration taking place a year later than initially scheduled after voting irregularities forced a redo. However, he had already ruled by decree for more than a year after he refused to schedule new parliamentary elections and the old legislature's term expired. [Protesters faced down](#) deadly violence from police and armed gangs as they demanded Moïse step down and that the US end its support for him.

US President Joe Biden called the killing a "heinous act," saying he was "shocked and saddened" by the news.

"The United States offers condolences to the people of Haiti, and we stand ready to assist as we continue to work for a safe and secure Haiti," Biden added. The US has intervened repeatedly in Haiti over the past century, overthrowing multiple governments and occupying the country with US troops while supporting pliant rulers amenable to US business interests. Haiti was the second European colony in the Western hemisphere to break free of European rule after the United States and the first ruled by African former slaves, who won their independence from France in 1804. However, while their revolution provided a potent example to African slaves in other European colonies, it terrified the governments that were based upon slave-owning and slave-trading classes, and Haiti became an international pariah and was blocked from further economic development.

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Haiti's President Moïse Was Killed By Foreigners 'Who Spoke Spanish', Preliminary Assessment Shows
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Haiti's acting President, Claude Joseph, told reporters Wednesday that slain former President Jovenel Moïse had been killed early Wednesday morning by a "group of non-identified individuals, some of whom spoke Spanish."

Joseph is leading the country at the moment in conjunction with the president's cabinet, until a new election can be organized. [Moïse's term expired](#) in February but after circumventing both parliamentary and presidential elections was left in sole control of the country, prompting [months of mass protests](#).

A two-week state of emergency has been declared in the Caribbean nation as the government mounts a manhunt for the [killers who slew Moïse](#) and injured his wife, Martine, at their home

outside the capital of Port-au-Prince. Joseph also declared 15 days of mourning, from July 8 through July 22.

During the state of emergency, Haitian authorities have been given widespread powers, [according to Gazette](#) Haiti News, including:

- carry out searches in the home of any person for the purpose of gathering all information allowing the apprehension of the assassins of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Jovenel Moïse
- prohibit all meetings they deem likely to stir up or maintain disorder in the territory of the Republic
- control access to traffic lanes
- strengthen security systems
- take any generally unspecified measures allowing to arrest the assassins of the Head of State

Video circulating on social media on Wednesday purports to show the team of assassins outside the presidential mansion, who identify [themselves as agents](#) of the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), a federal police agency that often operates in other countries. They can be heard speaking both Spanish and American English in the video. Bocchit Edmond, the US ambassador to Haiti, told Reuters there was "no way they were DEA agents."

Dominican media reported Wednesday that authorities were investigating the possibility that Moïse's assassins had fled into the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters the US is assessing the "tragic attack." "We stand ready and stand by them to provide any assistance that's needed," she said. "Of course our embassy and State Department will be in close touch but it's a tragedy. We stand with them and it's important that people of Haiti know that."

However, those words might not bring comfort to many Haitians' ears: months of mass protests have demanded the US end its support for Moïse, which they said was responsible for his unpopular government being kept in power. Moreover, in 1915, when Haiti's then-president, Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, was killed in an uprising provoked by his execution of rebel leaders, then-US President Woodrow Wilson invaded the country with US Marines, who established a puppet military regime that ruled the country until 1934, resulting in the deaths of more than 15,000 Haitians.

Moïse's rise to power began in the aftermath of the catastrophic 2010 earthquake that killed at least 230,000 people in Haiti, a desperately impoverished nation where few democratically elected leaders finish their terms, and both the United States and United Nations have repeatedly militarily intervened when persons or parties rise to power that threaten international business interests there. President Michel Martelly of the Tet Kale party oversaw the reconstruction effort, helped into power by then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Martelly prioritized profit-generating enterprises that served foreign interests, such as tourism, agribusiness, sweatshops, and mining, ensuring that donors to the Clinton Global Initiative directing aid to the country "made out like bandits," as the North American Congress on Latin American [\(NACLA\) nonprofit has put it](#).

Moïse's election campaign was likely financed by [Martelly's alleged embezzlement](#) of the PetroCaribe fund, but even then election irregularities delayed his inauguration by a year, leading him to claim that his term should last until February 2022, not 2021, as the country's Superior Judicial Council ruled and many Haitians felt was the case. The US State Department and United Nations both [backed Moïse's claim](#) of an extended term, however, and have continued to do business with his government even as increasingly deadly violence was deployed against protesters both by Haitian security forces and bands of armed gangsters.

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UK Ministers Mull Ban on Boiling Lobsters Alive, Further Acknowledge Animal Sentience by [Evan Craighead](#)

Queen Elizabeth II confirmed during a parliamentary speech in May that newly-proposed laws in Parliament would "ensure the UK has, and promotes, the highest standards of animal welfare." The intended policy shift - including the recognition of animal sentience - aligns with Prime Minister Boris Johnson's push for UK laws to consider animal welfare.

The UK Parliament's House of Lords is presently weighing multiple animal welfare-based laws that would, in part, prohibit the boiling of live lobsters, crabs and other crustaceans.

As of now, the proposed legislation would also prompt UK lawmakers to consider the feelings and overall well-being of sentient vertebrate animals.

However, animal welfare activists have been consistently pushing for laws regarding sentience to also be applied to invertebrates, such as octopuses, lobsters and cuttlefish.

Debate over which animals should be covered by the legislation comes alongside a UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs-commissioned study to determine the level of sentience for invertebrates.

"We're proud to have some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world, and we are fully committed to strengthening them further to ensure all animals avoid any unnecessary pain, distress or suffering," the government department wrote.

"We have commissioned an independent external review of the available scientific evidence on sentience in decapod crustaceans such as crabs and lobsters, as well as in cephalopods, which includes octopus, cuttlefish and squid — and we will carefully consider the results of this review which will be published in due course."

During his October 2019 Queen's speech, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson pledged to crack down on matters that violate the welfare of animals.

The prime minister also floated a number of environmental projects geared toward improving the UK's air and water quality. This was reiterated by Queen Elizabeth II during her speech from the throne in October 2019.

Johnson also declared that the announced proposals would prohibit trophy hunting imports. While the UK prime minister has done little to move the needle on animal welfare, Queen Elizabeth issued support for Johnson's overarching goal as she confirmed that at least three pieces of legislation would be introduced.

One of the bills notably calls for the post-Brexit recognition of animal sentience. If passed, the legislation, in essence, would require lawmakers to take animal welfare into account when introducing new laws.

During Brexit negotiations, former UK Prime Minister Theresa May, Johnson's predecessor, notably abandoned a clause of the Lisbon Treaty that stated animals are not to be treated as "goods" and that "full regard must be given to their welfare."

The other bills seek to block the exploration of live animals for slaughter, as well as impose an increased, five-year jail penalty. Within the latter bill, there is no maximum fine cap for those convicted of animal cruelty.

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Videos: Sirens Sound at US Embassy in Baghdad, Mission's Air Defence System Repels Attack - Reports

by [Evan Craighead](#)

Earlier this week, US forces stationed in the Iraqi capital downed what was described as an explosive-laden drone above the embassy of the United States of America in Baghdad.

[Early eyewitness reports](#) from the Baghdad area detailed that a thunderous sound, akin to a building collapse, shook the inside of the Green Zone early Thursday morning.

"We are aware of these reports. As this is an ongoing situation, we have no further details at this time", a spokesperson for the US-led coalition told Sputnik, referring to the emerging reports. Government agencies, as well as foreign diplomatic missions, are located in the impacted area of the Green Zone.

Footage purportedly depicting the scene has since been uploaded to Twitter, showing the missile defence system engaging the perceived threat.

At least two rockets were downed by nearby missile defence systems, according to Iraqi security sources who spoke with Reuters. One rocket was diverted by the embassy's defence system, while the other rocket landed outside of the Green Zone.

Earlier, unconfirmed reports claimed the attack was carried out by an unmanned aerial vehicle. Sirens can be overheard in additional footage recorded near the US mission.

The Thursday morning activation of the air defence systems comes alongside a series of sophisticated drone and aerial attacks that US forces have linked to Iran-backed groups within Iraq.

On Monday, an armed drone was shot down within the vicinity of the US Embassy in Baghdad's Green Zone. The downing came hours after a same-day attack targeted the Ain al-Asad base, a western Iraq military installation that presently houses US troops.

[Offensive attacks against US forces](#) and the embassy have seemingly increased since US President Joe [Biden ordered](#) so-called "defensive precision airstrikes" against [Iran-backed militants](#) near the Syrian-Iraqi border late last month.

Abu Alaa al-Walae, commander of the Iran-backed group Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada, [teased to the Associated Press on Monday](#) that his forces may utilise drones to carry out retaliatory operations for the Biden-ordered strike.

"We want an operation that befits those martyrs", al-Walae told the outlet, speaking of the four militiamen killed in the American "defensive" strike.

"We want it to be an operation in which everyone says they have taken revenge on the Americans", the commander contended. "It will be a qualitative operation (that could come) from the air, the sea, along Iraq's border, in the region or anywhere. It's an open war".

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'Las Olas Loop': Fort Lauderdale Accepts Underground Transit Project With Musk's The Boring Company
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Earlier this year, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, initiated talks with Elon Musk's The Boring Co. as city officials searched for innovative alternatives to additional high-rise commuter rail bridges. City officials claim the city-to-beach tunnel, dubbed "The Las Olas Loop," may alleviate street-level traffic and offer commuters a more efficient transit.

Fort Lauderdale Mayor Dean Trantalis (D) announced on Tuesday evening that his city formally accepted The Boring Company's proposal for the construction of "an underground transit system between downtown [Fort Lauderdale] and the beach".

Despite the city accepting The Boring Company's proposal, other firms will have a total of 45 days to submit a competing proposal.

"This could be a truly innovative way to reduce traffic congestion", Trantalis said, following the Fort Lauderdale City Commission's vote.

While the city's mayor gushed about the innovative nature of the project, he has also expressed that there are a number of checkpoints The Boring Company must reach before construction may begin.

"It must be something the community feels it needs and we can afford", Trantalis declared, as reported by The Sun Sentinel. "And it needs to help solve some of our acute traffic problems".

"We'll see where this goes", he concluded.

Per the outlet, an official at The Boring Company quoted the city a project fee valued somewhere between \$10 million to \$12 million per mile. Overall costs were estimated between \$60 million and \$72 million.

The city is unlikely to release any official details about the project during the 45-day period for competing proposals.

Preparations for The Boring Company's tentative "The Las Olas Loop" come weeks after the [Musk-founded infrastructure and tunnel service](#) opened the Las Vegas Convention Center Loop in Paradise, Nevada.

The \$47 million project for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority's convention center took less than a year to construct, and slashed cross-campus commuting estimates from 30 minutes to just two minutes.

Though the details of the newer contract remain private, it is now known that The Boring Company's agreement with the convention center's parent company was based on a fixed price. However, rather than receive a one-time payment, funds for the project were linked to specific construction milestones.

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Acclaimed Actor, Indie Filmmaker Robert Downey Sr. Dies Aged 85
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The acclaimed cult actor-director earned his very first directing, acting and writing opportunity with the 1961 short film "Balls Bluff," which follows a Civil War-era soldier who travels through time to New York City in the year 1961.

Famed actor-filmmaker Robert Downey Sr., who is best known for his 1969 satire "Putney Swope," died in his sleep at his New York home after spending years battling a Parkinson's diagnosis, his family announced Wednesday. He was 85.

The filmmaker's death was confirmed by both his son, Oscar-nominated actor Robert Downey Jr. and his wife, bestselling author Rosemary Rogers.

Downey Jr. memorialized his father via an Instagram post that detailed the elder Downey "passed peacefully in his sleep after years of enduring the ravages of Parkinson's ... he was a true maverick filmmaker, and remained remarkably optimistic throughout."

"According to my stepmoms [sic] calculations, they were happily married for just over 2000 years," Downey added. "Rosemary Rogers-Downey, you are a saint, and our thoughts and prayers are with you."

Downey Sr. had been suffering from Parkinson's disease for over five years.

The disorder is a neurodegenerative brain disorder that increasingly affects one's movement over a period of time. Although there are medications to ease the progression of symptoms, there is no cure.

The elder Downey's death has sent waves across social media, with many mourning netizens recalling their first introduction to the filmmaker's works, which included directing films "Greaser's Palace," "Putney Swope" and "Hugo Pool," among a bevy of films that date back to the early 1960s.

Later on in his career, Downey Sr. remained active in the acting circuit, taking on smaller roles in 1997's "Boogie Nights" and "Tower Heist," the 2011 action-comedy starring Ben Stiller and Eddie Murphy.

His final directing gig was documentary film "Rittenhouse Square" in 2005, according to [IMDb](#). Although the late actor made it a habit to distance himself from the media, he briefly stepped back in tune with the press after his Oscar-nominated son was arrested and faced cocaine charges in early 2001.

At the height of media coverage on Downey Jr 's cocaine troubles, the late filmmaker sat down for an [exclusive interview](#) with the New York Post in which he detailed his own past run-ins with drug addiction, noting that he too spent years using cocaine before kicking the habit in the early 1980s.

"Life is too easy when you're a movie star," he told the outlet at the time. "People will do anything you want and get you anything you want."

The IMDb site notes Downey Sr., a native of New York City, served in the US Army, dabbled in minor league baseball and became a Golden Gloves champion, as well as a Broadway playwright, all before he turned 22 years of age.

Downey Sr. is survived by his wife, son and daughter Allyson Downey.

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Videos: Massive Blast in Dubai Caused by Ship Fire Aboard Container Vessel, Authorities Confirm
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, eyewitnesses had shared a variety of photo and video posts that showed a fiery ball illuminating the Dubai night sky, as many others detailed shaking buildings across the city. A massive explosion was felt across much of Dubai late Wednesday after a container ship anchored along the United Arab Emirates' Jebel Ali commercial port unexpectedly caught fire and sent a wave of tremors across the area.

Government officials in Dubai have [confirmed](#) the blast was caused by a blaze that was set off inside a container aboard the vessel, noting that first responders with the Dubai Civil Defense team have brought the fire under control. Officials have [further indicated](#) that the explosion did not cause any injuries or fatalities.

A representative of the Dubai authorities relayed to broadcaster al-Arabiya that the fire reached such high intensity as "one of the containers [aboard the ship] had flammable materials."

Footage from the scene that was shared by the team shows emergency personnel working to fully extinguish the blaze.

Shocking footage that was initially shared of the incident documented a massive fiery cloud emerging near the port city as smoke billowed in the area.

Video of the exact moment that the explosion erupted has also surfaced on social media.

Additional footage of the blast was captured from an off-shore vessel.

Earlier, a bevy of netizens situated in nearby residential buildings within the Dubai Marina took to social media in an effort to pinpoint what prompted the sudden blast.

One user [previously detailed](#) that "several police cars" were seen "rushing" toward the port area from the residential district.

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US Air Force '60% Responsible' for 2017 Texas Church Shooting, Judge Rules
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The November 2017 shooting at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, claimed the lives of 26 individuals, effectively becoming the deadliest mass shooting in the state's history. The gunman, who killed himself after the attack, was later identified as a former service member with the US Air Force.

The US Air Force is mostly to blame for the deadly Texas church shooting that unfolded in late 2017 after officials failed to enter the shooter's criminal history into a federal database used for gun purchases, a federal judge ruled on Wednesday.

The ruling was declared by US District Judge Xavier Rodriguez for the Western District of Texas, and came in response to a civil lawsuit that had been filed by survivors and relatives of the 26 shooting victims.

Rodriguez outlined in his decision that the military branch was "60% responsible" for the deaths and injuries that emerged, underscoring that the US Air Force failed in adhering to federal background check guidelines.

Devin Kelley, who was identified as the gunman, served about five years in the US Air Force. He was booted from the service in 2014 for bad conduct after he was convicted on two counts of domestic assault on his former wife and her child. Kelley was subsequently ordered to serve one year in military jail, with officials also reducing his military rank.

At the time, Kelley had been serving in the Logistics Readiness at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico between 2010 and 2014.

The outcome of Kelley's sentencing should have prohibited him from ever legally purchasing a firearm in the US; however, his felony conviction was never entered into the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, which is tapped by firearm sellers to review whether an interested buyer is eligible to buy a gun.

In the US, any felony conviction bars individuals from owning a firearm. Kelley managed to purchase a rifle in [April 2016](#). It would be the same firearm he would later use to carry out the 2017 church attack.

"The trial conclusively established that no other individual - not even Kelley's own parents or partners - knew as much as the United States about the violence that Devin Kelley had threatened to commit and was capable of committing," the judge wrote, touching on Kelley's history of violence, ill-behavior toward women and interest in firearms.

"Moreover, the evidence shows that - had the government done its job and properly reported Kelley's information into the background check system - it is more likely than not Kelley would have been deterred from carrying out the church shooting."

It's worth noting that the US Air Force had [acknowledged](#) early on after the shooting unfolded that it had not submitted Kelley's criminal history to the federal database, as is required by the US Department of Defense.

The presiding judge granted the US government 15 days to come to terms on a settlement plan for the survivors and victims' families.

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Rafael Nadal to Debut in Washington's Major Tennis Tournament – Organizers

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) – Spanish tennis superstar Rafael Nadal will debut in a major Washington, DC competition later this summer, Citi Open chairman Mark Ein said on Thursday. "We are thrilled to welcome Rafael Nadal, who is not just one of the greatest tennis players of all-time, but also a global sporting icon and inspiring role model to our Washington community this summer," Ein said in a statement.

The Citi Open will be held from July 31 to August 8 in the US capital for the 52nd year running. Nadal, who currently ranks world number three, boasts 20 Grand Slam titles. He has won two Olympic gold medals along with 88 ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) single titles throughout his career.

"I am very excited to come to Washington for the first time," he said. "I have never been there and it's one more place I wanted to come and play."

On the way to his 89th ATP title, Nadal will have to contend with several other top players, including Russian world No.29 Karen Khachanov and Canadian No.12 Denis Shapovalov.

Washington's tournament still has five wildcards remaining to be announced before and during the 2021 Tokyo Olympic games, organizers said.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims Rise Again After 2-Week Decrease - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US jobless claims rose again last week after falling for two previous weeks in a row, with the Labor Department reporting an additional 2,000 filings for unemployment insurance this time that highlighted the job market's continued struggle for recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

"In the week ending July 3, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 373,000, an increase of 2,000 from the previous week's revised level," the Labor Department said in a news release.

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RPT - Haiti Envoy to US Says Too Early to Talk About Elections After President's Assassination

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik that it is too soon to talk about when presidential vote may take place after Haitian President Jovenel Moise was killed.

"It is too early to say that, to talk about that now because the authorities, they have to decide, they have to settle down first," Edmond said. "We'll have to wait until the authorities address this issue and see how we can move forward."

Haiti's interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph said Moise was killed by a group of unidentified gunmen at his private residence overnight. First Lady Martine Moise was hospitalized with a gunshot wound.

Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world, has been experiencing social, political and constitutional crises, with protesters blaming Moise for targeted killings, widespread corruption and an economic collapse.

The opposition has said it believes Moise's five-year-term should have ended in February 2021, five years after his predecessor Michel Martelly stepped down, but Moise insisted he had an additional year to serve, a position backed by the OAS.

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RPT: PREVIEW - UNSC Set to Address Situation in Haiti Thursday Morning After President Moise Assassinated

UNITED NATIONS, July 7 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will gather for an emergency meeting on Thursday morning to discuss the situation in Haiti after President Jovenel Moise was assassinated.

Moise was fatally wounded in an overnight attack on his residence in Petion-Ville, a suburb of the capital of Port-au-Prince. Haitian First Lady Martine Moise was injured in the attack and underwent a medical treatment.

The United States and Mexico requested the UN Security Council's presidency, held by France in July, to call an urgent meeting to discuss the situation in the Caribbean country.

"Given the current situation in Haiti, Mexico and the United States ask the presidency to arrange for consultations tomorrow morning on Haiti," US and Mexican diplomats said in a joint request to the UN Security Council president.

The two countries also asked the UN Security Council presidency and the Security Council Affairs Division to identify a briefer from the UN Secretariat to provide an update on the situation in Haiti after the assassination.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the bloc of three elected African states in the UN Security Council - Kenya, Niger and Tunisia - joined the request for consultations, which was shortly after approved by the presidency.

The consultations are set to take place right after the Security Council holds its already scheduled meeting on the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel at 10 a.m. (EDT).

The Special Representative for the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) Helen Meagher La Lime was later confirmed to brief the UN Security Council.

A diplomatic source at the world's body told Sputnik it is possible the UN Security Council will produce a joint statement following the upcoming meeting.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday strongly condemned the "abhorrent act" of the killing of the Haitian leader and called on Haitians to remain calm and preserve the constitutional order.

The United Nations mission in Haiti reported the situation on the ground remained "fairly tense but calm," UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

BINUH, consisting of some 1,200 personnel, had been advised to stay in a safe place as the personnel was being accounted for throughout Wednesday.

Haitian Acting Prime Minister Claude Joseph's office said based on preliminary data, the assassination was carried out by an "armed detachment" consisting of foreigners.

In light of this information, the government introduced a "state of siege" for a period of 15 days in order to ensure the capture of the perpetrators.

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RPT - US Embargo Prevents Cuba From Acquiring Over 30 Crucial Vaccine Supplies - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States trade embargo imposed against Cuba has hampered the island nation's ability to produce coronavirus vaccines as it was unable to obtain more than 30 pieces of supplies necessary for running the clinical trials, Cuban Permanent Representative to the United Nations Pedro Luis Pedroso Cuesta told Sputnik. Pedroso said Cuba's health sector lost more than \$198.3 million between April and December of 2020 due to the United States economic blockade against his nation.

"During the period under review, the country was unable to obtain a total of 32 pieces of equipment and supplies, related to the production of vaccines candidates against COVID-19 or the conduct of stages necessary for the completion of the clinical trials, including equipment for the purification of the vaccines candidate, accessories for production equipment, filtration tanks, and capsules, potassium chloride solution, thimerosal, bags and reagents," Pedroso said.

The ambassador explained that Cuba's health industry has been significantly challenged by shortages of essential products as the country faces difficulties in procuring supplies needed for drug manufacturing.

Under the so-called Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, foreign-based subsidiaries of US companies are prohibited from selling their products to Cuba.

Due to the US restrictions, Cuba had to resort to other intermediaries during the pandemic, leading to increase in prices of 60 percent as it was impossible to sign direct contract with the manufacturer, Pedroso said.

"This had an impact on the work of several institutions in the biopharmaceutical sector in Cuba, including the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology [and] the Finlay Vaccine Institute,... directly involved in the country's efforts to tackle the pandemic," he said.

Despite the economic blockade, Cuba has supported some 40 countries in their COVID-19 response and currently has five vaccine candidates for development, Pedroso added.

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US, Canada Express Concerns About Mexico Energy Policies - Trade Representative

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States and Canada have jointly expressed concerns about the Mexican government's attempts to increase state representation in energy projects involving international investors, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said. Speaking at a live-streamed news conference in Mexico City where she was joined by Canadian Trade Minister Mary Ng and her Mexican counterpart Tatiana Clouthier, Tai said the two countries were closely watching the energy policies of the Mexican government and raising concerns.

"Of course, we're both concerned and that's what we have expressed at this meeting," Tai said during the first anniversary of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement on Wednesday.

In April, the Office of the US Trade Representative voiced concerns about the worsening climate for US energy investors in Mexico. The statement came after Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador attempted to reverse previous reforms that enticed foreign investors and sought to strengthen the state's role in the energy sector, including bolstering the state oil company Petroleos Mexicanos.

Obrador's interventions upset some of Mexico's main allies, including the United States, Canada and major European countries, and angered investors who believe the government is violating their rights under trade agreements Mexico signed.

US energy companies have also expressed concerns about extended delays on permit approvals for retail fuel stations, as well as efforts by Petroleos Mexicanos to wrest away operational control of a big shared crude deposit discovered by a US-led consortium three years ago.

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US-Led Coalition Aware of Reports of Attack on American Embassy in Baghdad - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The US-led Coalition is aware of reports of an attack on the American Embassy in Baghdad but no further details are available at this time as the situation is ongoing, a spokesperson told Sputnik.

"We are aware of these reports. As this is an ongoing situation, we have no further details at this time," the spokesperson said on Wednesday.

The Al-Ghad broadcaster reported earlier that air raid sirens have sounded at the US Embassy in Baghdad and the diplomatic mission's air defense system is repelling a drone attack. The Baghdad Today portal said explosions are heard in Baghdad's Green Zone where the US Embassy is located.

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US, Turkish Defense Chiefs Discuss Afghanistan Withdrawal, Airport Security - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and his Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar discussed via telephone the Afghan withdrawal process and the importance of ensuring proper security for the Kabul international airport, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said in a press release.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke by phone today with Turkish Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar to discuss bilateral cooperation and our ongoing drawdown in Afghanistan," Kirby said in the release on Wednesday.

Austin and Akar underscored the critical task of ensuring there is enough security to protect the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Kirby said. The two defense chiefs agreed to continue talks on this matter soon, Kirby added.

Moreover, Austin and Akar also reaffirmed the importance of the bilateral defense relationship, Kirbys said.

Last month, Akar said that the Turkish military was negotiating safety measures with the US delegation for Afghanistan's major airport, adding that Ankara offered to take the matter over once NATO forces withdraw by September 11 - but on certain conditions, including financial and logistical backing.

The departure of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, scheduled to be completed by September 11, has been met with a surge in violence, with dozens of districts in Afghanistan's rural north falling to the Taliban in the past weeks.

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Ex-Trump Lawyer Giuliani Suspended From Practicing Law in Washington, DC - Court Documents

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's ex-attorney Rudy Giuliani has been suspended from practicing law in Washington, DC, court documents revealed.

"ORDERED pursuant to DC Bar Rule XI, § 11(d), that the respondent is suspended from the practice of law in the District of Columbia pending final disposition of this proceeding, effective on the date of entry of this order," the District of Columbia Court of Appeals said on Wednesday.

The court documents said Giuliani's suspension in Washington will be in effect pending the outcome to his license suspension in the state of New York, which was due to his role in trying to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election and for pushing lies about voter fraud. The 77-year-old Giuliani helped lead Trump's legal challenge to the election won by President Joe Biden, arguing that the vote had been rife with fraud and that counting machines had been rigged. The appellate division of the Supreme Court in New York, hearing the motion brought to de-license Giuliani over the matter, agreed that he had acted without merit.

Giuliani, admitted to the state bar in New York in 1969, was named US Attorney in Manhattan in 1983 and worked for the Justice Department during the Reagan administration. He also served as mayor of New York City for eight years, rising to national prominence during September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the city.

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At Least 37 US States Sue Google Over Alleged Antitrust Violations - Court Documents

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Thirty-seven US state and district attorneys general filed a lawsuit against Google alleging violations of antitrust laws, court documents revealed. [The state and district attorneys general] bring this civil enforcement action against Defendants Google LLC, Google Ireland Limited, Google Commerce Limited, Google Asia Pacific Pte. Limited, Google Payment Corp., and Alphabet Inc. under federal and state antitrust and consumer protection statutes, to enjoin Google from unlawfully restraining trade and maintaining monopolies in the markets for Android software application distribution and for payment processing of digital content purchased within Android apps in the United States, and to obtain redress for consumers," the lawsuit said on Wednesday.

The state and district attorneys in the lawsuit represent the states of Utah, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.

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Blinken in Call With Haitian Prime Minister Says US to Support Peace After Assassination

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a telephone call with acting Haitian Prime Minister Claude Joseph reiterated the United States is committed to help support peace and security in Haiti following the assassination of President Jovenel Moise. "Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with Acting Haitian Prime Minister Claude Joseph today. Secretary Blinken extended condolences to the family and loved ones of President Moise and to the people of Haiti," Price said on Wednesday. "Secretary Blinken reiterated the United States' continued commitment to work with the Government of Haiti in support of the Haitian people and democratic governance, peace, and security." Claude Joseph said earlier on Wednesday that Moise was killed by a group of unidentified gunmen at his private residence overnight. First Lady Martine Moise was hospitalized with a gunshot wound.

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Biden Says Will Speak About Situation in Afghanistan on Thursday

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters he will speak about the current situation in Afghanistan on Thursday, according to a White House press pool report. "I'll speak to that tomorrow," Biden said on Wednesday when asked if he is worried Kabul will fall to the Taliban.

The departure of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, scheduled to be completed by September 11, has been met with a surge in violence, with dozens of districts in Afghanistan's rural north falling to the Taliban movement in the past weeks.

Earlier on Wednesday, Human Rights Watch said the Taliban forces ordered residents in Bagh-e Sherkat in Kunduz province to evacuate and threatened those who had provided support to the Afghan government. The Taliban fighters looted and burned down their homes.

In recent days, hundreds of Afghan government soldiers fled to Tajikistan in order not to fall from in the hands of the Taliban, which now controls more than 70 percent of the Afghan-Tajik border. Uzbekistan has refused to accept Afghan soldiers who are trying to cross the border.

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Miami Condo Collapse Crews Transition to Recovery Ops as Death Toll Hits 54

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Crews working at the site of the collapsed condo building near Miami, Florida will be switching from search and rescue to recovery operations at midnight as the death toll reaches 54, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said at a press briefing.

"It is with deep, profound sadness that this afternoon I'm able to share that we made the extremely difficult decision to transition from operation search and rescue to recovery," Cava said on Wednesday.

Surfside Mayor Charles Burkett said the possibility of someone still being alive is near zero.

However, Burkett also said he has not lost hope because there could be a miracle.

Fire officials also said they project no more victims would be found alive.

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Biden Says Will Know Plan on Responding to RNC Cyberattack Thursday - Press Pool Report

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters that he will know by Thursday his response plan to the cyberattack against the Republican National Committee (RNC), according to a White House press pool report.

"The FBI is working with the RNC to determine the facts. ... I will know what I am going to do tomorrow," Biden said on Wednesday.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in earlier remarks that US media reports claiming the Russian cybercriminal group Cozy Bear is behind the cyberattack got ahead of the administration and the investigation and that an actual attribution has not yet been issued.

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Haiti Has Video Footage That May Be Clue in Moise Assassination Probe - Envoy to US

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik they have seen video footage of the alleged killers of President Jovenel Moise that may be a clue in the probe.

The assailants who killed Moise at his private residence earlier in the day claimed to be with the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Miami Herald newspaper reported, citing videos taken by people near the president's home. US State Department spokesperson Ned Price at a press briefing said reports of DEA's involvement are "absolutely false."

"We have seen video footages on the website, on the social networks," Edmond said on Wednesday. "I believe the national police probably would use them for investigation. Those can be considered as a clue for the investigation process. But what I can tell you is that we are working very hard."

Edmond also said the killers are not US DEA agents and that foreign mercenaries can be hired by anyone.

According to residents near the president's home, the report said, gunmen were seen dressed in black and firing high-powered rounds with precision.

There are also reports that a grenade and drones were used as well during the operation.

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Blackwater Founder Erik Prince Planned to Buy Factories, Private Army in Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Blackwater founder Erik Prince planned on hiring a private army of Ukrainian combat veterans and purchasing factories that make military aviation parts back in 2020, Time magazine reported.

Prince, who re-branded his US-based defense contracting company as Academi, allegedly planned on creating a "vertically integrated aviation defense consortium" in Ukraine that could bring in an estimated \$10 billion, the report said on Wednesday, citing interviews with close associates and confidential documents.

He hoped the factories could make engines for fighter jets and helicopters, according to the report. Prince also envisioned the consortium competing with top industry figures like Boeing and Airbus, the report added.

Talks with his Ukrainian business partners began in 2014, shortly after the Crimea reunification, the report said. They thought they could leverage the aviation technology in negotiations with Russia, according to the report.

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Pentagon Confirms 2 US Soldiers Injured in Rocket Attack on Al-Assad Air Base in Iraq

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Two members of the US military were injured during a rocket attack against the Ain Al-Assad Air Base that hosts Coalition troops in Iraq, Defense Department spokesperson Commander Jessica McNulty confirmed to Sputnik.

Earlier on Wednesday, Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman Col. Wayne Marotto said two personnel suffered minor injuries after 14 rockets were fired at the air base.

"I can confirm two US service members had the minor injuries in today's attack at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq," McNulty said in a statement on Wednesday.

This is the second rocket attack on the Ain Al-Assad base this week. On Monday, the air base was hit by three rockets that did not result in any injuries or material damage.

On June 27, the Defense Department said US fighter jets struck facilities of the Iranian-backed militants - Kata'ib Hezbollah and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada - in the Syrian-Iraqi border region in response to attacks against United States interests in Iraq.

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PREVIEW - UNSC Set to Address Situation in Haiti Thursday Morning After President Moise Assassinated

UNITED NATIONS, July 7 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will gather for an emergency meeting on Thursday morning to discuss the situation in Haiti after President Jovenel Moise was assassinated.

Moise was fatally wounded in an overnight attack on his residence in Petion-Ville, a suburb of the capital of Port-au-Prince. Haitian First Lady Martine Moise was injured in the attack and underwent a medical treatment.

The United States and Mexico requested the UN Security Council's presidency, held by France in July, to call an urgent meeting to discuss the situation in the Caribbean country.

"Given the current situation in Haiti, Mexico and the United States ask the presidency to arrange for consultations tomorrow morning on Haiti," US and Mexican diplomats said in a joint request to the UN Security Council president.

The two countries also asked the UN Security Council presidency and the Security Council Affairs Division to identify a briefer from the UN Secretariat to provide an update on the situation in Haiti after the assassination.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the bloc of three elected African states in the UN Security Council - Kenya, Niger and Tunisia - joined the request for consultations, which was shortly after approved by the presidency.

The consultations are set to take place right after the Security Council holds its already scheduled meeting on the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel at 10 a.m. (EDT).

The Special Representative for the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) Helen Meagher La Lime was later confirmed to brief the UN Security Council.

A diplomatic source at the world's body told Sputnik it is possible the UN Security Council will produce a joint statement following the upcoming meeting.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday strongly condemned the "abhorrent act" of the killing of the Haitian leader and called on Haitians to remain calm and preserve the constitutional order.

The United Nations mission in Haiti reported the situation on the ground remained "fairly tense but calm," UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

BINUH, consisting of some 1,200 personnel, had been advised to stay in a safe place as the personnel was being accounted for throughout Wednesday.

Haitian Acting Prime Minister Claude Joseph's office said based on preliminary data, the assassination was carried out by an "armed detachment" consisting of foreigners.

In light of this information, the government introduced a "state of siege" for a period of 15 days in order to ensure the capture of the perpetrators.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik)

HAITIAN PRESIDENT ASSASSINATED

- * Haitian President Jovenel Moise was assassinated at his private residence by a group of unnamed gunmen, the country's interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph said on Wednesday.
- * Joseph said martial law has been declared in Haiti after the murder, but the situation is under control.
- * The killers are not agents of the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) but are foreign mercenaries that can be paid by anyone, Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik.
- * The United States stands ready to assist Haiti after the assassination of Moise, US President Joe Biden said.
- * The United States and Mexico have requested the UN Security Council to hold a meeting on Thursday morning to address the situation in Haiti, a diplomatic source told Sputnik.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

- * The positive outcome of the meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden gives fresh hopes to stabilize bilateral relations, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said in an interview with Bloomberg on Wednesday.
- * Russia expects to find a compromise with the United States on the issue of humanitarian corridors, Antonov said.
- * The United States and Russia will conduct another round of negotiations on cybersecurity next week, Antonov said.
- * The United States and Russia have to normalize the functioning of their diplomatic missions, Antonov said.

PUTIN-PASHINYAN MEETING

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin and Armenian Acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan are not planning to sign any documents after their meeting on Wednesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said,
- * Putin congratulated Pashinyan on his victory in the parliamentary elections, noting that difficult issues can be resolved only with the people's trust, and he has it.

RUSSIA EXPELS ESTONIAN CONSUL

- * Russia declared Estonian consul in St. Petersburg Mart Latte persona non grata, the diplomat must leave the country within 48 hours, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.
- * The Estonian Foreign Ministry does not rule out reciprocal response to expulsion Latte from St. Petersburg, spokesperson Aari Lemmik said.

* The Russian Foreign Ministry told the Estonian Embassy Counselor that attempts to present the situation with the detention of the consul in St. Petersburg in a false light were inadmissible, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

AFGHANISTAN DEVELOPMENTS

* The current escalation in Afghanistan is leading to an increase in the number of refugees and is fraught with a humanitarian catastrophe, Afghan Foreign Ministry spokesman Gran Hewad told Sputnik.

* The Afghan government is ready for "any cooperation" and is taking the necessary measures to protect foreign diplomatic missions, Hewad said.

* The Afghan government calls on the region's countries to put pressure on the Taliban movement to end the violence and begin constructive peace talks, Hewad said.

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US Recruiter of Homeless People to Cash Fake Checks Pleads Guilty to Fraud - Justice Dept. WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - One of four defendants charged with fraud over a scheme to enlist homeless individuals to cash counterfeit checks pleaded guilty, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

"[Michael] Williams and his co-conspirators allegedly attempted to cash approximately \$677,687 worth of counterfeit checks throughout the New England region, causing losses to financial institutions of approximately \$480,000," the department said in a press release.

Appearing before US District Court Chief Judge John McConnell, Williams pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit bank fraud, the release said.

A United States Secret Service-led investigation determined that from October 2018 through February 2021, numerous homeless individuals were arrested at banks throughout the region attempting to cash counterfeit business checks, the release added.

Once a person agreed to cash a check, Williams and his co-conspirators created a counterfeit check made payable to the individual and then drove him or her to a bank to cash it. The checks were generally in the amount of \$2,000 or more. Individuals were often paid about \$100 per check that they successfully cashed, according to the release.

Williams is scheduled to be sentenced on September 21, and three other defendants are awaiting trial, the release said.

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Haiti Envoy to US Says Too Early to Talk About Elections After President's Assassination

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik that it is too soon to talk about when presidential vote may take place after Haitian President Jovenel Moise was killed.

"It is too early to say that, to talk about that now because the authorities, they have to decide, they have to settle down first," Edmond said. "We'll have to wait until the authorities address this issue and see how we can move forward."

Haiti's interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph said Moise was killed by a group of unidentified gunmen at his private residence overnight. First Lady Martine Moise was hospitalized with a gunshot wound.

Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world, has been experiencing social, political and constitutional crises, with protesters blaming Moise for targeted killings, widespread corruption and an economic collapse.

The opposition has said it believes Moise's five-year-term should have ended in February 2021, five years after his predecessor Michel Martelly stepped down, but Moise insisted he had an additional year to serve, a position backed by the OAS.

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Dominican Authorities Will Catch Assassins if They Try to Flee Haiti - Envoy to Sputnik

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Haiti believes that the Dominican authorities will help catch those responsible for the murder of Haitian President Jovenel Moise if they tried to cross the border of the country, Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"That state of emergency will certainly help us to make sure that we continue with the investigation, and we use every might... to seek for the killers," Edmond said. "And we believe that the Dominican authorities will help us. If they will try to cross the border, we are certain that they will be doing something to help us and catching them."

The Haitian government on Wednesday declared 15 days of national mourning over the president's assassination.

According to the office of Interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph, who succeeded Moise as president, the mourning will last from July 8-22.

Moise, who ruled the country from 2017, was killed by a group of unidentified armed men at his private residence on early Wednesday. First Lady Martine Moise was hospitalized with a gunshot wound.

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US Federal Reserve Leaning Toward Tapering of Bond Purchases - Meeting Minutes

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve officials think the better-than-expected US economic recovery means the time is nearing to begin tapering monthly bond purchases, though an exact time has not been decided on, minutes from the central bank's meeting last month revealed on Wednesday.

"The Committee's standard of 'substantial further progress' was generally seen as not having yet been met, though participants expected progress to continue," the minutes from the central bank's Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting held on June 14-15 said.

Various FOMC participants, however, expressed views that conditions for the Federal reserve to taper are likely to be "met somewhat earlier than they had anticipated at previous meetings in light of incoming data" on economic progress.

The Federal Reserve also signaled it was looking out for data on when to start tapering its monthly asset purchase of \$120 billion. The central bank has been buying at least \$80 billion in Treasury bonds and \$40 billion in mortgage bonds to support credit markets and the economy since the coronavirus outbreak last year.

The FOMC has also kept US interest rates at a super-low level of between zero and a quarter percent since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020. In its so-called dot-plot projections issued after the June meeting, the Federal Reserve forecast there might be two interest hikes before the end of 2023.

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US Invests \$35Mln in COVID-19 Test That Yields Results in 5 Minutes - Defense Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) – A \$35.1 million contract with COVID-19 test maker LightDeck Diagnostics seeks 20-fold expansion in production of rapid tests to 1 million per month, the Defense Department (DoD) said on Wednesday.

"These unique point-of-care tests deliver laboratory quality results in five minutes," a DoD press release said. "This industrial base expansion effort will increase LightDeck Diagnostics' domestic production capability of their SARS-CoV-2 Ultra-Rapid Antigen and COVID-19 Total Antibody Tests... from 50,000 tests per month to 1 million tests per month by September 2022." The contract is funded by the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), part of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through Health Care Enhancement Act, the release said.

The law enacted in April 2020 is intended to support domestic industrial base expansion for critical medical resources, the release added.

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Haiti President Assassins Not DEA Agents, But Foreign Mercenaries - Envoy to US

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The killers of Haitian President Jovenel Moise are not agents of the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the foreign mercenaries can be paid by anyone, Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"It can be foreigners. Because footage showed that they were speaking Spanish and they're speaking English. They were pretending themselves to be the agents of the DEA operation. We know it's false because they just wanted to mask the horrible act," Edmond said. "But the foreign mercenaries can be paid by anyone. So the most and probably the most important thing is to identify those killers and to make sure that they are being brought to justice because it is not an ordinary citizen is the head of state has been killed."

Edmond said Haiti is calling on its international partners to assist and help the country in this process of investigation to "identify those killers and those behind act."

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Blinken to Meet With Saudi Deputy Defense Minister on Wednesday - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will take part in a meeting between the Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman and senior US diplomats later on Wednesday, State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

"The [Saudi] deputy defense minister [bin Salman] will be in the building later today. He will be meeting with a couple of senior [US] State Department officials. I expect the Secretary [Blinken] will have a chance to take part in part of that meeting," Ned Price said during a press briefing. Earlier on Wednesday, Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman said that he had extensive talks with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and other senior military officials during his visit to Washington.

The Saudi defense official is visiting Washington for a series of meetings and has already met with the US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman and US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking to discuss the situation in Ethiopia and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

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Haitian Police Working to Ensure Security of Embassies, Organizations - Envoy to Sputnik

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Haiti's National Police will continue to safeguard all the diplomatic missions and all international organizations in the country to ensure they can keep on working in the country following the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise, Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik.

"Of course, the National Police would continue to secure all embassies, all international organizations and make sure that they can continue to work in the country. That's our responsibility. And I believe we are going to do our best to carry on with this mission," Edmond said.

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Haitian Envoy Says Country's First Lady on Her Way to Miami, Does Not Doubt US Security

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik on Wednesday that the country's First Lady Martine Moise is on her way to Miami, Florida for urgent treatment, after her husband President Jovenel Moise was assassinated. "The First Lady is already on an airway to Miami," Edmond said. "We sent a plane to pick her up, and then we believe she will be taken care of at the hospital here in Miami... There is no doubt that the US authorities will... make sure that she is being protected." The ambassador pointed out that the First Lady is being flown by a private chartered airplane.

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US, French Envoys to Discuss Lebanon's Crisis With Saudi Officials Thursday - State Dept.
WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea and her French counterpart Anne Grillo will travel to Saudi Arabia this week to discuss with Saudi officials the political and economic crisis in Lebanon, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

"I can confirm our Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea will in fact travel alongside the French Ambassador to Lebanon Anne Grillo to Saudi Arabia for meetings with Saudi officials on July 8," Price said during a press briefing.

Shea is expected to discuss the gravity of the situation in Lebanon, as well as to emphasize the importance of humanitarian aid for the Lebanese people and increased support for the country's security forces, Price said.

The ongoing economic crisis has deprived Lebanese state and private companies of funds to purchase enough fuel to cover demand in the country, leading to gasoline shortages.

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Haiti Contacted US After President's Assassination, Int'l Help Welcome - Envoy to Sputnik

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The Embassy of Haiti contacted the US authorities after the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise and Washington is looking into what it can do to help, Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik on Wednesday. "We did contact the United States, the White House today," Edmond said. "We believe they are trying to see how they can help. And any other international help would be welcome. But the most important thing is to keep trying to catch those killers, because we certainly believe they

were not themselves carrying out a job, probably they have been paid for. So we need to identify who is behind, it is very important.

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Haiti Needs Help in 'Int'l Manhunt' of 'Foreign Commandos' Behind President's Killing

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Haiti may ask the international community to help deal with security matters following the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise, Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"I think now the most important thing in terms of assistance is to seek where those countries and our international partners can help us in this international manhunt, because it's very important to identify the killers," Edmond said. "As well probably in the very short-term future to help us address the security matters, because this is an example that can show you there was a weakness in the security apparatus."

"If the foreign commandos could enter the country so easily and carried out this act of assassination against the president, to some extent, it is something that needs to be condemned," the envoy added. "And so far, I'm very satisfied and I'm glad of the international reactions, international condemnation. And now it's very important to work to strengthening our security forces."

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Situation in Haiti 'Stable,' Measures to Maintain Security Taken - Ambassador to Sputnik

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik on Wednesday that the situation in the country is presently stable after the country was rocked by the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise overnight, with the authorities are taking measures aimed at controlling the security.

"What I can tell you is that the current situation is, I would say, stable," Edmond said. "The current authorities are taking measures to make sure that the security situation is controlled to avoid any more chaos. Two weeks of emergency state has been declared by the current government so we can have better control of the situation."

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US Defense Dept. Needs to Cut Billions in F-35 Costs to Achieve Affordability - Report

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The US military services face tens of billions in sustainment costs that could make plans to acquire nearly 2,500 F-35 aircraft unaffordable, the General Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report on Wednesday.

"For example, the Air Force needs to reduce estimated annual per-plane costs by \$3.7 million (47 percent) by 2036, or costs in that year alone will be \$4.4 billion more than it can afford," the report said.

Instead, estimated sustainment costs over the aircrafts' 66-year life cycle have risen steadily since 2012 - from \$1.11 trillion to \$1.27 trillion - despite efforts to trim expenses, the report said. The F-35 program estimates that it will declare Milestone C - a decision point for moving into full-rate production of the aircraft - sometime in the 2021-2023 time frame, the report added. But without assessing cost-reduction efforts and program requirements, such as number of planned aircraft, and developing a plan prior to declaring Milestone C, the Defense Department may continue to invest resources in a program it ultimately cannot afford, according to the report.

The report recommended that Congress consider making future purchases of the fifth-generation aircraft contingent on progress reducing sustainment costs.

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US Assures Assange He Will Not Be Held in Maximum Security if Extradited - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The US has assured WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and the UK government that he will not be held in strict "supermax" conditions if extradited to the US for trial, the Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday.

The assurance is part of an ongoing effort to put Assange on trial for espionage and computer fraud. The US has been after Assange ever since Wikileaks published thousands of classified files about war crimes and human rights violations allegedly committed by US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Earlier on Wednesday, the US received limited permission from a UK court to appeal a January decision not to extradite Assange. The court blocked the extradition citing health concerns and suicide risk should he be placed in the US prison system.

The US has also reportedly assured Assange that he can serve any jail time in his native Australia should he be tried and convicted.

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US Expects Seventh Round of Talks on Iran's Nuclear Program - State Department

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States has every expectation that there will be a seventh round of talks on Iran's nuclear program, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Wednesday at a press briefing.

"Nothing is certain in the world of diplomacy but we have every expectation that there will be a seventh round of talks at the appropriate moment, at the right time," he said.

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Reports of DEA Involvement in Assassination of Haiti's President 'False' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Reports that Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents were involved in the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise are false, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

"These reports are absolutely false, the United States condemns this heinous act. These false reports are nothing more than that, just false reports," Price said when asked to clarify whether DEA agents were involved in Moise's assassination.

Price added that there are no clear answers yet as to who is responsible for the assassination.

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US Urges Haiti to Bring Responsible for President's Assassination to Justice – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) – The United States calls on Haitian authorities to bring those who assassinated President Jovenel Moise last night to justice, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Wednesday.

"We urge Haitian authorities to bring those responsible [for Moise assassination] to justice," Price told reporters during a press briefing.

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US Earmarks Over \$50Mln for 31 Clean Energy Projects Using Hydrogen - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will invest \$52.5 million in 31 projects to develop next generation technologies to produce energy from clean burning hydrogen, the Energy Department said on Wednesday.

"Part of our path to a net-zero carbon future means investing in innovation to make clean energy sources like hydrogen more affordable and widely adopted so we can reach our goal of net-zero

carbon emissions by 2050," Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in a press release announcing the initiative.

The 31 projects will focus on bridging technical gaps in hydrogen production, storage, distribution and utilization technologies, including fuel cells, thereby paving the way toward decarbonization of the electricity sector by 2035 – an interim goal toward Biden administration vision of a zero-carbon economy by mid century, the release said.

A transition to hydrogen will require advances in technology needed to make the clean-burning fuel both cheaper and easier to produce, the release also said.

Technologies targeted by the initiative include production of hydrogen from water using electricity, as well as production using biological and electrochemical processes, the release added.

Researchers will also attempt to develop more efficient fuel cells designed for heavy-duty applications. Fuel cells combine hydrogen and oxygen to produce energy with emissions limited to water vapor, according to the release.

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EU Seeks to Include Switzerland in Its COVID-19 Certificate System – EU Commissioner

BRUSSELS, July 7 (Sputnik) - The European Union is eyeing the inclusion of Switzerland in its system of COVID-19 certificates, EU Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders told the European Parliament on Wednesday.

"We are also willing to work with interested partners around the world that wish to connect their COVID-19 certificates to the EU system... The first outer country to be connected will be Switzerland," Reynders said.

The commissioner recalled that the European Economic Area (EEA) countries, such as Norway, which is not an EU member, already take part in the EU system of COVID-19 certificates. Switzerland is neither a member of the EU nor the EEA.

The legislation on digital COVID-19 certificates went into effect in the EU on July 1, while all its members connected to the system. The document is issued in both paper and digital forms for people who underwent the full inoculation, have a negative PCR-test, or recovered from the disease and have antibodies. The certificate has QR-code and can be used via a mobile phone. It is designed for travels inside the EU zone. The certificate is designed for travels inside the EU zone.

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Austria Begins Trial of 5 Alleged Jihadists Supporting IS - Reports

MOSCOW, July 7 (Sputnik) - The Vienna Regional Court on Wednesday launched criminal proceedings against five alleged militants of the Islamic State (IS, a terrorist organization banned in Russia), the newspaper Die Presse reported.

The main suspect in the case is a 32-year-old Chechen man named Turpal I. The prosecution maintains that in late August 2013, he left Austria for Syria with his family to fight for the IS under the name Abu Aische. The man is accused of ordering at least seven beheadings in a small village outside the city of Aleppo, as well as fatal shootings of those living in a residential building in the town of Haritan in northern Syria. He is also suspected of making three women in the town slaves. The defendant's lawyer denies all charges.

Another suspect subject to trial is Mirsad O., alias Ebu Tejma, a radical Islamist who on Wednesday pleaded guilty in offenses involving the recruitment of young Chechens, including Turpal I, into the IS.

The meetings, which are scheduled to last until the end of July, are held in compliance with the strictest security measures. The hearing was guarded by ten armed special forces personnel from the judicial guard in masks, while photography and filming were strictly prohibited.

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Taliban Burns Homes, Displaces Residents for Cooperating With Kabul - Rights Group

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The Taliban (banned in Russia) have forcibly displaced residents and burned homes in northern Afghanistan in retaliation against government supporters, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on Wednesday.

"Residents of Bagh-e Sherkat in Kunduz province said that from June 21 to June 25, Taliban forces ordered residents to evacuate and threatened those they said had provided past support to the Afghan government. Taliban fighters looted and burned down homes," HRW said in a press release.

The offensive coincides with the withdrawal of US forces after two decades of fighting following the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Taliban forces entered Bagh-e Sherkat and, with loudspeakers, ordered residents to vacate their homes in two hours. About 400 families fled the town, some going to Taloqan, 70 kilometers east, and about 200 fled to Faizabad, Badakhshan province, 230 kilometers east, the release said.

HRW said it obtained the information from telephone interviews with former residents of Bagh-e Sherkat in early July.

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Biden to Welcome Jordan's King Abdullah to Washington on July 19 - White House

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will host Jordan's King Abdullah at the White House on July 19 to discuss mutual security concerns in the Middle East, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"The President and the First Lady look forward to welcoming His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan, Her Majesty Queen Rania and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hussein to the White House on July 19, 2021," Psaki said in a press release.

Psaki added that Biden and King Abdullah will discuss security challenges in the Middle East and Jordan's role in ensuring stability in the region.

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US Travel Industry Urges Biden to Lift International Flight Restrictions by July 15

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - A coalition of 24 US travel organizations released a report on Wednesday urging the Biden administration to lift international travel restrictions by July 15.

"Ease entry restrictions by July 15, 2021, when the US is forecast to achieve widespread immunity and sustained declines in infections and hospitalizations," the report said.

The US travel industry also calls on the federal government to immediately reopen travel between the United States and the United Kingdom and to quickly allow fully vaccinated individuals from non-high-risk countries to enter the United States.

The US Travel Association, which is among the 24 signatories, said for each week that travel restrictions remain in place, the US economy is losing \$1.5 billion in spending from Canada, the European Union and the United Kingdom, which is enough money to support 10,000 jobs in the United States.

Other signatories in the blueprint policy include Airlines for America; Airports Council International – North America; the Aeronautical Repair Station Association; the Aerospace Industries Association; the American Association of Airport Executives, among others.

The United States currently has entry restrictions for foreign travelers from China, India, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Iran, Ireland, Brazil, and South Africa.

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Moderna Launches Flu Vaccine Trial, Targets Single Jab For Multiple Diseases

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The onset of a flu vaccine trial using messenger-RNA (mRNA) technology could lead to a single jab targeting multiple respiratory diseases, including COVID-19, vaccine maker Moderna said on Wednesday.

Moderna's goal of making a single vaccine against multiple viruses was included in a press release announcing the onset of a phase 1 study of mRNA-1010, the company's seasonal influenza vaccine candidate. The company said it plans to enroll 180 participants in the trial.

"Respiratory combination vaccines are an important pillar of our overall mRNA vaccine strategy," the release said. "We believe that the advantages of mRNA vaccines include the ability to combine different antigens to protect against multiple viruses."

Conventional vaccines use all or part of a modified pathogen to trigger an immune response. In contrast, the mRNA - used in both Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 jabs - instructs cells to produce copies of the spike protein on the coronavirus surface. The protein then causes the body to develop immunity.

Messenger RNA vaccines offer a number of advantages over traditional inoculations in that they can be quickly designed and scaled up, using a manufacturing process that is highly adaptable to different pathogens, according to the National Institutes of Health.

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UN Security Council to Hold Consultations on Haiti Thursday Morning - Source

UNITED NATIONS, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council will hold an emergency meeting on Thursday morning at the request of the United States and Mexico to discuss the situation in Haiti following the assassination of President Jovenel Moise, a diplomatic source at the UN told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"The request by Mexico and the US supported by Kenya, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Tunisia was duly noted and the Security Council intends to hold consultations on Haïti tomorrow morning," the source said.

The source added the consultations would take place after a meeting on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel scheduled for 10 a.m. (EDT).

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American Airlines Cancels 3 Flights to Haiti After President Assassinated - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - American Airlines has canceled three flights to Haiti after the assassination of the country's President Jovenel Moise and will evaluate situation to adjust its schedule, company spokesperson Whitney Zastrow told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"The airport is closed, so we've canceled our flights out of Port-au-Prince (PAP) today and will continue evaluating and adjusting our schedule as needed. We currently operate three departures a day out of PAP," Zastrow said.

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US, Mexico Request UN Security Council to Meet on Haiti Thursday Morning - Source

UNITED NATIONS, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States and Mexico had requested the UN Security Council to hold a meeting on Thursday morning to address the situation in Haiti after President Jovenel Moise was assassinated, a diplomatic source told Sputnik on Wednesday. "Mexico and the United States asked the presidency of the Security Council to arrange for consultations tomorrow morning on Haiti," the source said. Kenya, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Tunisia also joined the request for consultations, the source added.

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US Trade Chief Asks Mexico to Expand Access for American Potatoes, Biotech

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative Katherine Tai has requested that Mexico grant greater access to American potatoes and biotech on a visit to Mexico City to mark the first anniversary of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), her office said Wednesday.

"Ambassador Tai emphasized the importance of Mexico immediately resuming the authorization of biotechnology products and inquired about the status of expanding access for US fresh potatoes throughout Mexico," the Office of the US Trade Representative said in a statement issued after Tai's meeting with Mexico's Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development, Victor Villalobos and Secretary of Economy, Tatiana Clouthier.

Tai, Villalobos and Clouthier discussed the implementation of USMCA's environment chapter, including concerns related to the conservation and protection of the vaquita, illegal fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, and sea turtle bycatch, the statement said.

The three officials agreed to work together to fully implement and enforce the USMCA's high-standard environmental commitments.

They also discussed the potential mutual benefits of aligning Mexico and the United States' policy on ethanol gasoline blends.

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UN Envoy to Haiti in Contact With Acting Prime Minister - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, July 7 (Sputnik) - UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Helen La Lime maintains constant contact with Acting Prime Minister Claude Joseph as some 1,200 staffers at the mission are in the process of being accounted for after the killing of Haitian President Jovenel Moise, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

Martial law was declared in Haiti in the wake of Moise's assassination at his private residence on Wednesday night.

"The SRSB is meeting with her senior staff, she is in constant contact with the Acting Prime Minister of Haiti," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

In her discussions with the interim Prime Minister, La Lime addressed the ways the United Nations can help the Haitian authorities to coordinate support for the government, Dujarric said. "We have about 1,200 staff at all in Haiti, a little less than 200 are international. They are all being in the process of being accounted for, so that process should be done very quickly," he said.

The United Nations is ready to assist the Haitian government in any way it can if a green light is given to launch an international investigation into the killing of Moise, but will require a mandate to do so, Dujarric added.

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OAS Says Assassination of Haiti President is 'Affront' to All Nations Represented in Group

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The Organization of American States (OAS) said on Wednesday that the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise is an affront to all the nations represented in the OAS.

Haiti's interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph said Moise was killed by a group of unidentified gunmen at his private residence overnight. First Lady Martine Moise was hospitalized with a gunshot wound.

"We condemn in the strongest terms the assassination of the President of Haiti, Jovenel Moise, a criminal act that occurred early today," the OAS said in a press release. "This attack is an affront to the entire community of democratic nations represented in the Organization of American States."

The OAS said the assassination is an attempt to undermine the stability of the Haitian government and is calling for an end to this form of politics that threatens to derail the country's future.

Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world, has been experiencing social, political and constitutional crises, with protesters blaming Moise for targeted killings, widespread corruption and an economic collapse.

The opposition has said it believes Moise's five-year-term should have ended in February 2021, five years after his predecessor Michel Martelly stepped down, but Moise insisted he had an additional year to serve, a position backed by the OAS.

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US to Send 2Mln Coronavirus Vaccine Doses to Bolivia, Paraguay Thursday - White House

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is set to send 1 million doses of coronavirus vaccines to Bolivia and Paraguay on Thursday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters.

"Today, we're announcing we're sharing more doses with Latin America. 1 million Johnson & Johnson doses will be headed to Bolivia on Thursday. One million doses of Pfizer will be sent to Paraguay," Psaki said during a gaggle aboard Air Force One on Wednesday.

The move is part of the Biden administration's commitment of sharing 80 million doses with countries around the world. Psaki said on Tuesday that the vaccines are allocated on the basis of availability, as well as whether countries are ready to receive and administer them.

Guatemala and Vietnam received a combined 3.5 million doses of the Moderna vaccines on Tuesday and 4 million doses of the Moderna vaccine were sent to Indonesia late last week.

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White House Says Biden Administration Probing Cyberattack on RNC

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday that the Biden administration is investigating reports of the recent cyberattack against the Republican National Committee (RNC).

"We of course are investigating, the FBI and CISA [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency] are in touch with the RNC and we will determine attribution and make a decision accordingly," Psaki said during a press gaggle aboard Air Force One.

Psaki said US media reports claiming the Russian cybercriminal group Cozy Bear is behind the cyberattack got ahead of the administration and the investigation and that an actual attribution has not yet been issued.

None of the RNC's data was accessed and the breach targeted a third-party contractor associated with the group, Psaki said.

Biden said in earlier remarks that he will deliver to Russian President Vladimir Putin his national security team's assessment of the latest ransomware attacks, including the breach against the IT management software company Kaseya, which affected a number of US companies. US media reported that these attacks were allegedly conducted by the Russia-linked REvil hacking group.

During the June 16 summit in Switzerland, Putin and Biden agreed to launch bilateral cybersecurity talks in light of several high-profile cyberattacks against US infrastructure, in which US officials suspected Russian involvement despite Moscow's protests to the contrary.

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White House Stands Ready to Assist ATF, Chicago Police Following Officers' Shooting

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The Biden Administration is monitoring the shooting of two Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) agents and one Chicago Police Officer this morning and stands ready to assist, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said aboard Air Force One on Wednesday.

"We are closely monitoring the situation in coordination with the Department of Justice and ATF. We stand ready to provide any assistance needed. Our thoughts go out to the two ATF agents and the Chicago Police Department Officer who were wounded, as well as their families, and fellow agents and officers," Psaki said.

Two ATF agents and one police officer were non-fatally shot while conducting an investigation early Wednesday morning in Chicago. A total of 36 officers have now been shot in Chicago this year, according to the city's police chief.

Psaki added that Biden's rescue plan provides Chicago with \$1.9 million, and that Chicago is participating in a community violence intervention collaborative and is working with the Department of Justice to launch a gun trafficking strike force.

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US, Russia Have to Normalize Functioning of Diplomatic Missions - Ambassador Antonov

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia have to normalize functioning of diplomatic missions, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Wednesday.

"We have to normalize functioning of diplomatic missions," Antonov told in an interview with Bloomberg.

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Ambassador Antonov Confirms US, Russia to Conduct Another Round of Cyber Talks Next Week

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia will conduct another round of negotiations on cybersecurity next week, Russian ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov in an interview with Bloomberg aired Wednesday.

"It's very soon, in a few weeks there will be another round of strategic stability consultations in Europe between senior officials," Antonov said.

The statement comes in the wake of cyberattacks against the US government and private companies, including the Microsoft Exchange and SolarWinds hacks, as well as ransomware attacks on Colonial Pipeline and meat producer JBS Foods. Russia has repeatedly denied any involvement in cyber activity targeted against the United States.

One of the most recent reports concern the alleged breach of the Republican National Committee's (RNC) computer systems by "Russian government hackers." The Russian embassy in the US vehemently denied the report.

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Russia Hopes to Find Compromise With US on Humanitarian Corridors in Syria - Ambassador

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Russia expects to find a compromise with the United States on humanitarian corridors, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said in an interview with Bloomberg aired Wednesday.

"Let's give opportunity to our teams to deal with this issue, I hope they [Russia and the US] will find compromise," Antonov said when asked about Syrian corridors and whether they will be extended.

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White House Says Biden Administration Probing Cyberattack on RNC

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday that the Biden administration is investigating reports of the recent cyberattack against the Republican National Committee (RNC).

"We of course are investigating, the FBI and CISA [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency] are in touch with the RNC and we will determine attribution and make a decision accordingly," Psaki said

Psaki said US media reports claiming the Russian cybercriminal group Cozy Bear is behind the cyberattack got ahead of the administration and the investigation and that an actual attribution has not yet been issued.

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Russian Ambassador to US Says Putin-Biden Meeting Gives Opportunity to Stabilize Ties

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The positive outcome of the meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden gives fresh hopes for a chance to stabilize the ties between the two nations, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said in an interview with Bloomberg aired Wednesday.

"It seems to me that positive result of Russian-American Summit in Geneva gives us a fresh opportunity to stabilize relations of the two nations," Antonov said.

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Trump Announces Class Action Lawsuit Against YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, CEOs

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has announced a class action lawsuit against Facebook, Twitter, Google subsidiary YouTube and their CEOs.

"Today, in conjunction with the America First Policy Institute, I'm filing a major class action lawsuit against the big tech giants including Facebook, Google and Twitter, as well as their CEOs Mark Zuckerberg, Sundar Pichai, Jack Dorsey," Trump said during a news conference. Trump added he demands an end to "silencing" and "blacklisting" in the United States, adding that both are "unconstitutional and un-American."

The plaintiffs' statements were expressed in three separate documents - the first concerning Facebook and Zukerberg, the second concerning Twitter and Dorsey and the third is against Youtube and Pichai.

The lawsuit says the status of the three tech giants "rises beyond that of a private company to that of a state actor" and is constrained by the First Amendment right to free speech in the censorship decisions it makes regarding their users.

"Plaintiff, a sitting President of the United States, was banned by the defendants, as were putative class members, using non-existent or broad, vague and ever-shifting standards," the lawsuit said.

Facebook and Twitter have maintained their bans on Trump are not censorship but were set up for public safety in response to the January 6 unrest at the US Capitol.

Trump signed an executive order in 2020 to reduce legal protections for social media companies from liability for the content that users post on their platforms. Current President Joe Biden canceled that executive order in May.

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UN Security Council May Address Situation in Haiti on Thursday - President

UNITED NATIONS, July 7 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council might convene an emergency meeting on Thursday to discuss the situation in Haiti following the assassination of President Jovenel Moise, French Ambassador and President of the Security Council Nicolas de Riviere told reporters on Wednesday.

"Maybe, tomorrow, I think, we [will] discuss Haiti," de Riviere said when asked whether the council plans to address the assassination of the country's leader that took place overnight.

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Biden Says Will 'Deliver' to Putin His Team's Review of Recent Hack Against Kaseya

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - US President Biden said on Wednesday that he will send Russian President Vladimir Putin his team's assessment of the recent ransomware attack against the IT management software company Kaseya, which affected a number of US companies.

"I will deliver it to him," Biden told reporters outside the White House when asked whether he will share details of his briefing to the Russian side.

Biden was briefed on the cyberattack on Tuesday, he said there was minimal damage to US businesses.

US media reported that the attacks were conducted by the Russia-linked REvil hacking group. During the June 16 summit in Switzerland, Putin and Biden agreed to launch bilateral cybersecurity talks in light of several high-profile cyberattacks against US infrastructure, in which US officials suspected Russian involvement despite Moscow's protests to the contrary.

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Death Toll in Florida Building Collapse Rises to 46 as 10 More Bodies Found- Mayor

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) – The number of victims in the apartment building collapse in Surfside, Florida has reached 46, as 10 more bodies have been recovered, the mayor of Miami-Dade county Daniella Levine Cava said on Wednesday.

"Since our last briefing, the US&R [Urban Search and Rescue] teams recovered an additional 10 victims, bringing the total confirmed deaths to 46. 32 of these victims have been identified," she told reporters.

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US Job Openings in May Almost Hit Previous Month High - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Employers in the United States created a near record of 9.2 million job openings in May, almost matching the all-time peak of April, the US Labor Department said in a report on Wednesday.

"The number of job openings was little changed at 9.2 million on the last business day of May," the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, a division of the Labor Department, said in the report.

Some 6 percent of job openings in May were newly posted, the same amount as April, the report said.

"The layoffs and discharges rate, while little changed over the month, hit a series low of 0.9 percent," it added.

The Federal Reserve has forecast a 6.5 percent economic growth for all of 2021 although Chairman Jerome Powell has said he does not expect "full employment" - defined by a monthly unemployment rate of 4.0 percent or lower - to occur anytime soon. In June, the unemployment rate stood at 5.9 percent.

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Gunmen Who Killed Haitian President Claimed to Be US Drug Enforcement Agency - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The assailants who killed Haitian President Jovenel Moise at his private residence claimed to be with the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Miami Herald newspaper reported on Wednesday citing videos taken by people near the president's home.

The report said that in the video an American accent is heard yelling in English "DEA operation. Everybody stand down. DEA operation. Everybody back up, stand down."

However, a high-ranking Haitian government official told the Miami Herald the assailants were not DEA agents, but mercenaries, among whom one spoke with an American accent. Sputnik reached out to the DEA for comment on the matter but did not receive an immediate response.

According to residents near the president's home, the report said, gunmen were seen dressed in black and firing high-powered rounds with precision. There are also reports that a grenade and drones were used as well during the operation.

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Canada's Trudeau Offers Assistance to Haiti Following Moise Assassination

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) – Canada stands ready to assist Haiti following the assassination of the country's president, Jovenel Moise, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday.

"I strongly condemn the appalling assassination of President Moise this morning. Canada stands ready to support the people of Haiti and offer any assistance they need," Trudeau said in a statement via Twitter.

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Trump Announces Class Action Lawsuit Against Google, Facebook, Twitter, CEOs

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has announced a class action lawsuit against Facebook, Google and Twitter and their CEOs, Mark Zuckerberg, Sundar Pichai and Jack Dorsey.

"Today, in conjunction with the America First Policy Institute, I'm filing a major class action lawsuit against the big tech giants including Facebook, Google and Twitter, as well as their CEOs Mark Zukerberg, Sundar Pichai, Jack Dorsey," he said at a news conference. He added that he demands an end to "silencing" and "blacklisting" which is "unconstitutional and un-American."

The former president is completely banned from Twitter and is banned from Facebook for the next two years following the January 6 Capitol riots.

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Biden Says US Stands Ready to Assist Haiti Following Assassination of President Moise

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The United States stands ready to assist Haiti after the assassination of the country's President Jovenel Moise, US President Joe Biden said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The United States offers condolences to the people of Haiti, and we stand ready to assist as we continue to work for a safe and secure Haiti," Biden said.

The US president condemned what he called was a "heinous act" and expressed hope Haiti's First Lady Martine would quickly recover.

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UN Chief Urges Haitians to Preserve Constitutional Order After Assassination - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, July 7 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on all Haitians to preserve the constitutional order following the assassination of President Jovenel Moise and urged for the perpetrators of this crime to be brought to justice, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The Secretary-General condemns in the strongest terms the assassination of President Jovenel Moise of the Republic of Haiti. The perpetrators of this crime must be brought to

justice," Dujarric said. "The Secretary-General calls on all Haitians to preserve the constitutional order, remain united in the face of this abhorrent act and reject all violence."

After Moise's assassination at his private residence by a group of unnamed gunmen overnight, Haiti declared a state of emergency.

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Monthly Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide Measurement Sets New Record in May - US Agency
WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) – Carbon dioxide (CO2) levels measured at a US observatory in the state of Hawaii in May rose to the highest level recorded in more than six decades, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said on Wednesday.

"Atmospheric carbon dioxide measured at NOAA's Mauna Loa Atmospheric Baseline Observatory peaked for 2021 in May at a monthly average of 419 parts per million (ppm), the highest level since accurate measurements began 63 years ago," an NOAA press release said. CO2 is by far the most abundant human-caused greenhouse gas, and "persists in the atmosphere and oceans for thousands of years after it is emitted," Scripps' Institution of Oceanography scientist Charles Keeling said in the release.

In May, NOAA's measurements at the mountaintop observatory averaged 419.13 ppm.

Scientists at Scripps calculated a monthly average of 418.92 ppm, the release added.

The highest monthly average CO2 levels of the year typically occur in May, just before plants in the northern hemisphere begin removing large amounts of CO2 from the atmosphere during the growing season.

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UN Security Council Shocked by Haiti President's Assassination - Irish Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 7 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council is shocked by the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise that took place overnight, Irish Permanent Representative to the United Nations Geraldine Byrne Nason said on Wednesday.

"It's really, really sad, shocking development to see the President of Haiti assassinated," Byrne Nason told reporters.

Moise was assassinated at his private residence by a group of unnamed gunmen. After the assassination, Haiti declared a state of emergency.

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Trump to Announce Lawsuits Against Twitter, Facebook CEOs Zuckerberg, Dorsey - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump is set to announce class-action lawsuits today against the CEOs of Facebook and Twitter, Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey, Axios reported on Wednesday citing sources.

The former president is completely banned from Twitter and is banned from Facebook for the next two years following the January 6 Capitol riots.

Trump's new legal action is backed by the America First Policy Institute (AFPI), a non-profit organization that seeks to defend and preserve his policies. Its president and CEO Linda McMahon and board chair Brooke Rollins, former Trump administration officials, will be beside him when he announces the action, Axios said.

The class-action lawsuits will allow Trump to sue the Facebook and Twitter chiefs on behalf of a broader group of people that, he maintains, have been censored by their biased policies, the report noted.

Facebook and Twitter have maintained that their bans on Trump are not censorship but were set up for public safety in response to the January 6 riot that stormed the Capitol, which Trump critics claim was an "insurrection" against the government and political system, Axios said.

As president, Trump in 2020, signed an executive order to reduce legal protections defending social media companies from liability for the content that users post on their platforms. Trump's successor, current President Joe Biden canceled that executive order in May.

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US Embassy in Haiti Restricts Staff to Embassy Compounds After Assassination of President

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) - The US Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti is restricting the movement of its staff to the Embassy compounds following the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise at his private residence by a group of unnamed gunmen early Wednesday morning, a statement from the Embassy said.

"Due to an ongoing security situation, the US Embassy is restricting its direct-hire US citizen staff to the Embassy compounds in Tabarre until further notice. The Embassy will be closed today, including for consular services. Please avoid unnecessary travel in this area at this time," the statement said.

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Trump to Announce Lawsuits Against Twitter, Facebook CEOs Zuckerberg, Dorsey - Reports

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The former president is completely banned from Twitter and is banned from Facebook for the next two years following the January 6 Capitol riots.

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Americans' Life Satisfaction Climbs to Highest Level in 13 years - Gallup Poll

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) – A measure of life satisfaction in the US whipsawed from a record low during the pandemic to a rare high, according to the latest Gallup poll in a series going back 13 years.

"The percentage of Americans who evaluate their lives well enough to be considered 'thriving' on Gallup's Live Evaluation Index reached 59.2% in June, the highest in over 13 years of ongoing measurement and exceeding the previous high of 57.3% from September 2017," a press release explaining the poll said.

In contrast, the thriving percentage plunged nearly 10 percentage points to 46.4 percent by late April 2020 – a low point in the coronavirus pandemic - tying the record low last measured during the Great Recession, the release said.

The most recent results, captured June 14-20, 2021, are based on 4,820 U.S. adults surveyed by web as a part of the Gallup Panel, a probability-based, panel of about 120,000 adults across all 50 states and Washington, DC, the release added.

The marked improvement of key wellbeing metrics thus far in 2021 is due to a variety of factors, likely led by the widespread availability and rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines, according to the release.

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Police Officer, 2 Federal Agents Wounded in Shooting While Undercover – Superintendent

WASHINGTON, July 7 (Sputnik) – Two federal agents of the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and one police officer have been non-fatally shot while conducting an investigation this early morning in Chicago, Illinois, Superintendent of Police David Brown said on Wednesday.

"At 5:50 a.m. [10:50 GMT] this morning. We have had three officers shot. Two of the officers shot are ATF agents and one of the officers shot is a Chicago police officer," Brown told reporters during a press briefing. "Each of these officers have non-life-threatening injuries. They are all in stable condition being treated."

One of the ATF agents was shot in a hand, another in the arm, and the Chicago police officer was hit in the back of the head while they were inside a car working in an undercover capacity, Brown added.

The Chicago police chief noted that this is the 36th officer shot in Chicago since the beginning of this year.

The amount of gun violence cases has sharply increased in the US over the past months. On Tuesday, Governor Andrew Cuomo declared a state of emergency in the state of New York in an effort to curb the number of shootings and murders.

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UN Rights Expert Calls for Blocking Revenue to Myanmar Junta, Banning Arms Exports

UNITED NATIONS, July 7(Sputnik) - UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar Tom Andrews on Wednesday called for the creation of an Emergency Coalition to reduce the revenue and weapons influx that the country's military receives, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said in a press release on Wednesday.

"Andrews cited five key actions the Emergency Coalition should take: significantly reduce the revenue that the junta needs to continue its reign of terror by coordinated tough targeted sanctions, including against Myanmar Oil & Gas Enterprise [and] outlaw the export of arms to the Myanmar military, as called for in last month's General Assembly resolution," the release said.

Addressing at the Human Rights Council in Geneva earlier in the day, Andrews said the military junta has committed crimes against humanity since seizing power on February 1.